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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000970

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: ECUADOR: MINGOV LOSING SLEEP

Classified By: AMBASSADOR KRISTIE A. KENNEY REASON 1.4 (B&D)

11. (C) Summary: In a meeting with the Ambassador, an unfocused Minister of Government Mauricio Gandara discussed his mostly theoretical goals for the (maximum) 18 months remaining for the Palacio government. His top priorities were police reform and a referendum to propose a constitutional assembly and electoral reform. Gandara said he would not reach out to the discredited Congress, expecting them to come to him instead. End Summary.

Police Reform a Top Priority

12. (C) On April 28, the Ambassador had a one-on-one breakfast with a tired Gandara to discuss the government's next steps. Top on Gandara's agenda was police reform. He believed police had behaved poorly during the recent protests and now had no credibility. Police needed to focus on reforming itself to focus on human rights and justice weaknesses. By his estimation, 90% of the public hated the police. Gandara said he had met with various human rights groups early after taking office and was committed to cleaning up his ministry, which includes direction of the national police.

Government Plans Evolving

13. (C) Gandara said he would move forward with a referendum, which might possibly propose a constitutional assembly to change the Constitution and electoral reforms. He was not sure how the assembly would mesh with President Palacio's proposed dialogue roundtables, announced on April 26. Half of the members of any assembly should be composed of people aged 25-35. Electoral reform would focus on limiting the number of political parties and eliminating the second round of presidential elections.

14. (C) Gandara said forming the new Cabinet had been challenging as family and friends of Palacio were coming out of the woodwork to request government posts. Gandara said he insisted to Palacio that all Ministers be honest and warned against nepotism. Gandara still had much work to do organizing his own Ministry, he said. He wanted to propose some posts be reserved for youth, on a revolving basis, to give young leaders experience in governance.

Too Proud To Approach Congress

15. (C) Gandara said Congress was very weak and discredited. Therefore, he would not approach Congress; they must come to him. The Ambassador suggested that the government might use this opportunity to look at structural long-term reform, and urge Congress to pass important laws pending; Gandara did not bite.

Comment

16. (C) Gandara was doing his best to be charming, but could not resist the urge to burnish his nationalistic credentials. Gandara made a point of telling the Ambassador that he stood by his past editorials against the US and faulted El Comercio newspaper for "inappropriately" publishing an editorial by the Ambassador earlier this month.

17. (C) Clearly affected by a lack of sleep, he appeared tired and unfocused, and obviously had not had time to think through some policy proposals. We will continue to promote US priorities with the Minister, while keeping in mind his anti-US bias and the need to handle him gently.

KENNEY